DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 310 529 EA 021 251

AUTHOR Joyce, Mark
TITLE Cultivating Excellence: A Curriculum for Excellence in School Administration. I. Introduction: Is There a Common Role for an Educational Leader?
INSTITUTION New Hampshire School Administrators Association, Durham.
PUB DATE Jun 89
NOTE 21p.; For other documents in the series, see EA 021 251-256.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Characteristics; *Administrator Effectiveness; *Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; *Excellence in Education; *Leadership Qualities; *Leadership Responsibility; Leadership Styles; Supervision

ABSTRACT

This report is the first of a series on cultivating excellence in education for the purpose of training and retraining school leaders of the 1990s. The common role of educational leaders is discussed. Their central areas of responsibility and administrative and leadership skills are reviewed, not as discrete concepts, but as complex and dynamic dimensions of that role. Central areas of responsibility include a working knowledge of the personnel function, finance, communications and community relations, student services, curriculum and instruction, and capital improvements and maintenance. Administrative and leadership skills should reflect efficient planning, evaluating, supervising, directing, communicating, organizing, and coordinating. (JAM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED310529

CULTIVATING EXCELLENCE

A Curriculum for Excellence in School Administration

I. Introduction: Is There a Common Role for an Educational Leader?

By

Dr. Mark Joyce
Superintendent of Schools, SAU #17

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richard Goodman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Prepared by the
New Hampshire School Administrators Association

June, 1989

Morrill Hall, UNH, Durham, NH

Funding provided by the Governor's Initiatives for Excellence in Education

EA021351

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IS THERE A COMMON ROLE FOR AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER ?

When is a SUPERINTENDENT a SUPERINTENDENT

or a .....PRINCIPAL a PRINCIPAL ?

Introduction

The role of an educational leader, whether a Central Office Administrator or a Building Level Administrator, has been defined and described in a variety of ways. Some views of our role include those of: an instructional leader, a coach, a manager, a chief executive officer of a complex organization, a financial officer, a communicator of a vision, a facilitator of people, a problem solver and on goes the list.... Depending on the expert you believe, the research base you use or the journal you read, the role description of a leader of an educational organization may drastically differ. Yet amid these varied opinions there appears to be agreement that our role is unique, multidimensional and challenging.

As a practicing school leader and a teacher of leaders I am at times impressed, confused, exhilarated and overwhelmed by the varied demands placed on our jobs. In reality I understand that there can be no simple formula that will guide our work nor would I desire one. Yet, I am aware that the varied definitions send confused messages that communicate significantly different expectations of the "appropriate" role of school leaders. This fact may

contribute to the common situation where two individuals with the same job title actually execute very different jobs.

Upon reflecting about the evolution of public education, it is apparent to this author that the nature and purpose of our work is determined by many factors and subject to constant change. To a major degree we are influenced by regional, national and international developments to which each local community creates its own response, sets its own values and establishes its own priorities. Given our awareness that we work in a dynamic and pluralistic occupation, I still wonder... Is it possible to begin to define a common role for school leaders ? Is it worth the extra effort ? or Are our roles so dependent on our local setting and individual preferences, they defy generalization ?

My responses to these questions are: YES, YES and MAYBE. Let me explain my thinking and I will caution you that this is only one man's opinion.

YES, it is possible to begin to define certain broad areas of administrative/leadership responsibility that are shared by most educational leaders. From my experience, reviews of research and discussions with colleagues, there appears to be at least, six broad areas in which educational leaders work. These include the areas of: Finance, Communications and Community Relations, Curriculum and Instruction, Personnel, Capital Improvements/Maintenance,

and Student Services. In reality, there are variations to any one individual's involvement in these areas depending on whether his/her work is focused at the school or district level and on the availability of support personnel. Yet, it appears clear that each educational leader must be able to move among these roles in the course of leading an educational organization. In a later section, I will define these roles and suggest some common skills we employ in leading each of these areas; but for now, on to the second question.

YES it is worth it, to spend the extra efforts to begin to identify a common ground for educational leaders. I respond to this question from two different perspectives, one as a school admnistrator and the other as a teacher of educational leaders.

From the "trenches", we do not often have the luxury of reflecting on the new research, contemplating the overall parameters of our career or masterfully orchestrating a strategic plan. Instead we are often immersed in fixing leaky roofs, solving explosive personnel problems, stretching tight resources, reacting to complaints and responding to other threatening critical issues that surround our organizations. When we attempt to step back and say hold it, we are not spending our time wisely. Let's look at the overall picture. We are met with responses like: "Isn't that your job ?" or "We set the priorities and you carry them out" or "What big picture ?"

On the other hand, from the "Ivory Tower", we are sometimes discouraged at the lack of application of sound theory to practice. It seems so clear that there is a correct way to: supervise employees, strategically plan, market a school, evaluate programs and lead organizations. We often spend our time specializing in a certain aspect of education, researching, testing, writing, and coaching practitioners. Yet, what we see is the existence of partial applications of good ideas, and we are frustrated by the lack of overall planning and thoughtful implementation.

My favorite analogy for describing the role of a leader is the image of a masterful juggler who is spinning plates on thin sticks (Illustration No. 1). He/she carefully balances a spinning plate on a stick and periodically applies more spin in order to maintain the precarious balance. As his/her skill improves the juggler/leader is able to simultaneously spin several plates and even successfully spin plates on top of plates.
The juggler was not expected to begin to spin twenty plates at once, nor was he/she expected to spin a refrigerator, a toaster, a football, a grapefruit and an egg simultaneously. Rather the juggler was first taught the skills of juggling, given time to practice and experiment, and allowed the opportunity to perform his/her art.

As educational leaders and teachers of leaders, our juggling is made more difficult, because we are unclear about what we must juggle and the table on which we spin our

plates is constantly moving. If we begin to identify our "plates" it will allow each of us time to practice and update our skills, communicate our job (both the art and science) to others, gain a mutually accepted understanding of our roles and perform those roles more effectively.

In response to our final question, my response is MAYBE..... Maybe? ....is a political response, some might say, to the question of whether our roles defy generalization. In earlier sections of our discussion I have identified my belief that it is possible to begin to identify a common ground for educational leaders...so why MAYBE ?

The reason for this apparent mixed signal is to clearly underscore the reality that our positions are in large measure shaped by the local community or communities for whom we work. In order to discover the unique local interpretation of a leader's role, educational leaders are faced with answering several critical questions. What are the needs, values and priorities that are unique to your community(ies) ? What are the leader's personal needs, values, priorities and skills ? And how do you best develop a mutually acceptable understanding of your role as an educational leader ?

As educational leaders we need to develop a clear understanding of what our role should be, examine our own priorities and negotiate a common understanding of our role and its expectations with our superiors. Whether this occurs

between a superintendent and his/her school board or a building administrator and his/her central office administrator, it is a critically important step. I would submit that this is not a new concept nor an unpracticed theory, rather it is a step that successful educational leaders and leaders in other professions have practiced for years.

It is important, however, for us to understand the difficulty of this challenge, in that we have many publics and superiors to consider in our analysis. Unlike our contemporaries in business or other institutions, we must consider a variety of influences and struggle with balancing a myriad of sometimes conflicting interests. The interests of board members individually and collectively, of citizens/taxpayers, of students, of parents, of staff, of the state legislature and society as a whole, are among the many pieces to consider in our analysis. It is easy to see how educational leaders may be discouraged at the specter of such a challenge. Yet, it is equally apparent that we need to rise to this opportunity to develop a clearer understanding of our role or be content with working in a confused and conflicted profession.

A plethora of current research is focusing on identifying the vehicles used to achieve this difficult balance. They are varied and may include: the establishment of a strong organizational culture; creations of traditions; collaboratively developing a long term plan; or simply

establishing a working rapport and understanding with our superiors. Whatever vehicle we may choose, the importance of developing a common understanding of what plates we will juggle and on what surface they will balance are critical beginning steps for an educational leader. The resolution of these questions and challenges will change our response to this question from a "Maybe" to a "Yes".

To summarize one person's response to these introductory questions: it is my belief that we can begin to define the basic responsibilities of educational leaders and that this effort will not only enhance our performance, but it will further enable the success of public schools in meeting their unique challenge.

A VIEW OF AN EDUCATIONAL LEADER'S ROLE

Overview

The following model is being offered as a beginning framework for defining a common role for educational leaders and is not meant as definitive perspective but rather a starting point for continued development. In addition, it is important to recognize at the onset that the elements identified as "central areas of responsibilty" and "administrative and leadership skills" are not discrete concepts but, selected terms, designed to provide a useful division of the complex and dynamic dimensions of a leader's role.

Central Areas of Responsibilty For Educational Leaders

. Personnel.

. Finance.

. Communications and Community Relations.

. Student Services

. Curriculum/Instruction.

. Capital Improvements and Maintenance.

Each educational leader moves among these areas of responsibility in the course of executing his/her role as either a building, district or multi-district administrator. As previously identified, any individual's involvement may vary significantly depending on the availability of support personnel whose primary focus is specialized to only one of the areas.

The following section includes a brief definition and examples of job responsibilities that fit within each of the areas of responsibility. Illustration No. 2 visually suggests a relationship among these areas and demonstrates the overarching impact that the area of "Personnel" has on all other areas of responsibility. If we may return to the analogy of the juggler, these six areas may be common plates that all school leaders need to spin on a regular basis.

.Personnel

As a leader of a human service organization, an educational leader principally relies on the efforts of people to execute virtually all areas of service. As a result the recruitment, orientation, supervision, compensation, and evaluation of all employees is a critical, central responsibility of leaders. Theoriticians and practitioners alike realize that most of our services and products are accomplished by and through working with people.

Educational leaders spend a great deal of time formulating or implementing collective bargaining agreements, and personnel policies; resolving complaints about employees; developing staff members; responding to numerous spontaneous problems; motivating and leading people. Whether at a building or district level, prudent school leaders realize that successful personnel practice is a critical element in success in each of the five remaining areas of responsibility.

.Finance

The acqusition and management of resources (broadly interpreted) is a second major area of responsibility for a superintendent or principal. Throughout the school year each member of a leadership team works through a cycle that may begin with the planning, creation and marketing of a proposed budget and move through the implementation of expenditures and the monitoring of balances. Knowledge of

the areas of computer operations, accounting principles, school finance regulations and laws, marketing strategies, financial planning and more, are all pieces of this area.

This author recalls the advice of a wise educator who once shared this insight with a young central office administrator. "You can know a lot of things, you can be the best speaker or the clearest thinker..... but if you mess up the finances you are dead! Always know where the money is and where it went!" As years go by this author relearns the value of this free advice.

.Communication and Community Relations

As managers of large organizations, that basically rely on the involuntary payments of all citizens (taxes) as our sole source of income, we are clearly impacted by the changing tides of public opinion. During the last few years public educators have begun to formally develop "new and improved" ways of regularly communicating with our publics. In some cases we are simply using good common sense PR and in others we have borrowed from our contemporaries in the business world. As examples, we now see more schools formally assigning employees to this area of operations, more active and controlled use of the news media, the institution of regular and attractive publications and the selective use of advertisement.

Long gone are the days (if they ever existed) when educators were smug bureaucrats who coldly resisted the concerns and criticisms of public scrutiny. Today

educational leaders are faced with the difficult task of convincing the general public that we are good at what we do, we are committed to be better, and we will need more resources to continue our work. All these variables contribute to the emergence of this area as a major "plate to spin" for educational leaders in the 1990's.

.Student Services

At the base of all operations for a school system lies the delivery of regular and special services for our students. Included on this plate would be all services provided to students except the more formal curriculum and instructional programs, which will be outlined in a following section.

The tremendous growth of special education services and to a lesser degree the emergence of gifted/enrichment programs are examples of relatively new additions to this crowded area of responsibility. Even the traditional school services such as: transportation, guidance, health, food, student behavior control, extra-curricular activities and vocational programming are taking on new dimensions as a result of rapid changes in our society. This area continues to be a necessary, potentially explosive and valuable part of a successful school system.

In reality, recent studies in school management demonstrate that a practicing school administrator spends more time working in this arena than in any other area of responsibility. It is interesting to note the relative

absence of coordinated preservice or inservice training on these topics for school leaders.

.Curriculum/Instruction

Several years ago the literature was clearly calling for the school principal and the superintendent to become "An Instructional Leader" and "A Curriculum Expert". Our profession was criticized for spending time on trivia and not monitoring the heart of the school. (Depending on your perspective and values, the other five plates may apparently be full of "trivia".)

Certainly all educators would agree that the curriculum (the WHAT of a school) and the instructional program (the HOW of a school) are collectively the central focus (meat and potatoes) of our business. Current research has and continues to produce exciting findings of promising practices that may prove to improve and enhance our WHAT and HOW. The challenge exists as to how educational leaders will use this new information. Will we thoughtfully integrate these new or reshaped strategies, and concepts or will we haphazardly force them into an already crowded and overburdened system?

.Capital Improvements and Maintenance

The final but certainly not least important plate that a school leader must spin centers on the maintenance, improvement and growth, of the facilities used by public school systems. Historically regarded as a "less important"

activity for educational leaders, this area is growing in its importance as schools find themselves faced with overcrowded buildings, outdated core facilities and increased regulations (asbestos, oil storage tanks, etc.).

In reality, with the exception of personnel costs, the largest long-term investment for any public school system lies in the construction, maintenance, and renovation of its physical plant and grounds. As we move towards the 1990's school leaders are now expected to be able to: design detailed enrollment projections, develop long term personnel and facility plans, design and market building programs, plan maintenance programs, implement asbestos and waste disposal, as well as keeping all schools clean. Although not glamorous work, an educational leader's efforts in this area are critical to the school's ability to provide a safe, adequate and attractive work and learning environment.

Summary Of Major Areas of Responsibility

Returning to our example of the juggler, the preceding section attempts to identify one person's interpretation of at least six of the basic plates that a school leader must be able to spin. Certainly the degree of difficulty of this effort changes as the contents of each plate varies. It is however, fairly safe to assume that in the course of an average day, week and year, an educational leader will be expected to masterfully spin these plates in rapid succession if not simultaneously.

A reasonable person might ask: How is this possible?

How can any one person be expected to master specialized knowledge in each of these areas? In response to these questions I would like to share two perceptions. First of all, it is not my intent to suggest that educational leaders are entirely unique or superpeople (although I possess an obvious bias). Certainly prudent leaders are able and willing to call upon specialists like architects and computer specialists to augment their knowledge in specific areas.

Secondly, it is my belief that there are certain fundamental and universal skills that are employed by leaders in all of the areas identified above. Like the juggler who by learning basic balancing techniques and is able to use them to spin, toss or throw various objects, a leader learns, practices and artistically applies certain skills to lead in all areas.

Central Leadership and/or Administrative Skills

.Planning.

.Evaluating.

.Supervising.

.Directing.

.Communicating.

. Organizing and Coordinating.

The areas suggested as central skills are more generic in their focus than those areas of responsibility previously discussed. Successful leaders are able to practice these skills and others in each of the areas of responsibility and at times synthesize these skills and apply them simultaneously to multiple areas in the course of overall operations. An example of this powerful application may be seen in the use of "stategic planning techniques" in developing long term improvement plans in all areas of school organization.

The following section includes a brief definition of some examples of personal skills that compose a beginning framework of the areas of Central Leadership or Administrative Skills. The following sections of this curriculum outline will develop these areas in thoughtful detail. Illustration No. 3 visually suggests a relationship between these areas and the six broad areas of responsibility previously discussed.

.Planning

The ability to thoroughly assess long and short term needs and to develop goals and action plans designed to successfully meet the needs.

.Evaluating

The ability to thoughtfully select and apply both formative and summative assessment practices to areas involving personnel and programs.

.Supervising

The ability to develop and implement systems and practices that successfully guide the development of people and operation of programs.

.Directing

The basic knowledge of and competency to apply the principles of leadership and management theory, in creating and elaborating a vision for an organization.

.Communicating

The personal human relations skills that allow and enable a leader to effectively interact with all members of a school organization.

.Organizing and Coordinating

The knowledge of and the ability to synthesize, arrange and apply various strategies (including those mentioned above) in an orchestrated manner designed to achieve an organization's goals.

SUMMARY

At the onset of this essay I suggested that there existed great variation in the definition of the "appropriate role(s)" for an educational leader and wondered if it is possible and advantageous to develop a common understanding. At the completion of this effort I remain firm in my belief that there are clear advantages to

clarifying the role of a leader despite the obvious uniquenesses that exist in our profession and in our system of local control. If we are successful in developing a clearer view, it will be easier to develop and renew the knowledge and skills of effective school leaders, to rekindle a partnership between theory and practice and to communicate our profession to others.

Like the juggler, there exists great mystery about the knowledge and skills that underpin our "trade". The following Chapters of this work will focus on beginning to define and elaborate on certain broad areas of responsibility of and basic skill for educational leaders. Each work is authored by a distinguished member of the educational community and includes ample references that will guide the readers' further research. The overall purpose of these materials is to begin to define a "curriculum" that will be used to train and retrain school leaders of the 1990's.

Dr. Mark V. Joyce

May, 1989

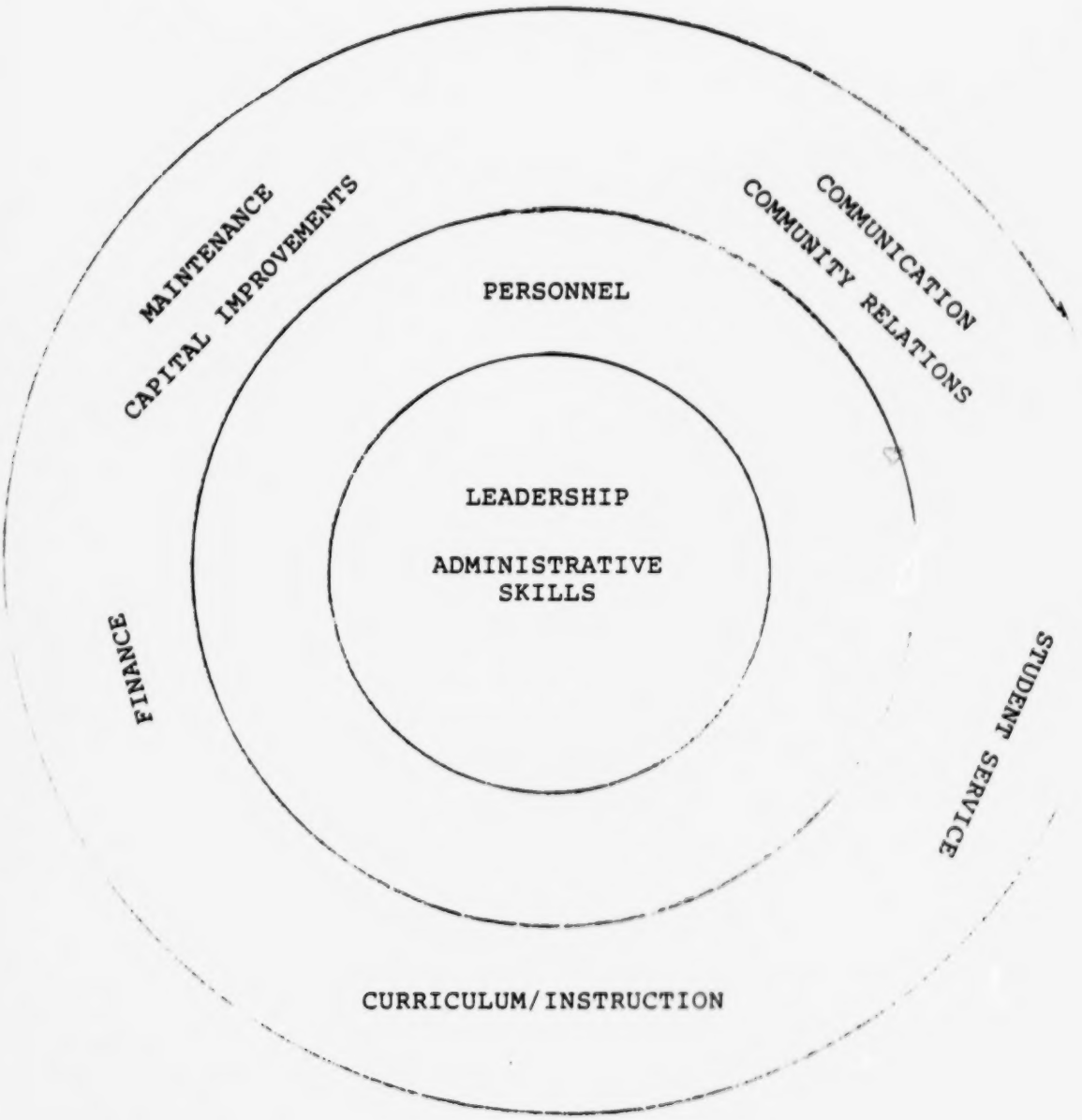

ILLUSTRATION #2

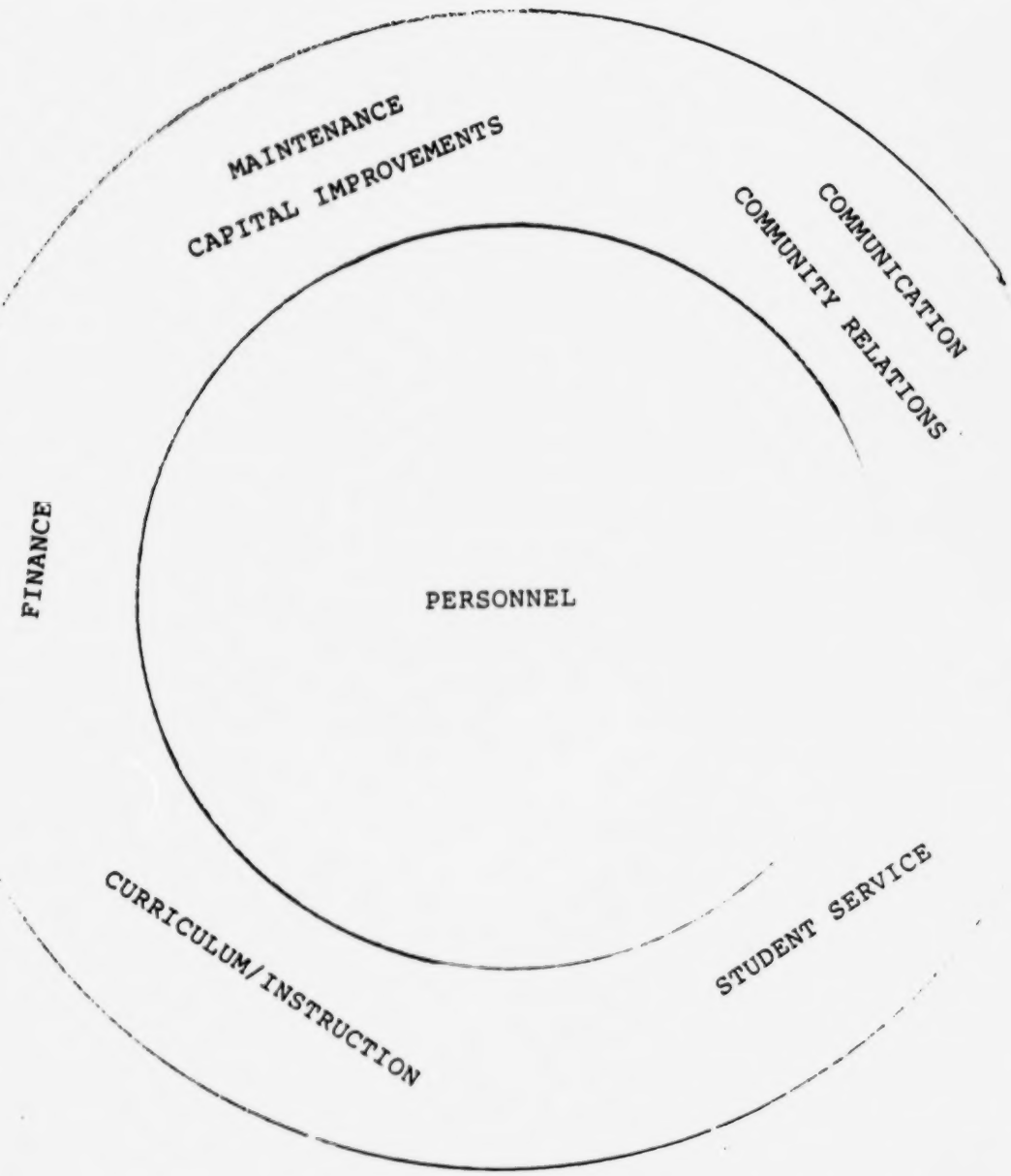

ILLUSTRATION #3